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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the difficulties deaf and hard-of-hearing children (d/hh) have in test taking and the test-taking strategies they use, such as visual matching of words in the text to words in the question. These specific strategies are different from those used by children without disabilities. Also examined are the characteristics and reading comprehension of d/hh test takers compared to their performance on a reading comprehension task. The responsibility of teachers to develop and teach test-taking strategies for students with hearing impairments is stressed. Suggestions for developing these abilities include: (1) exposing children with hearing impairments to the full spectrum of testing procedures that different teachers use to determine learning, including text-based learning; (2) providing extensive practice in taking different types of tests; and (3) producing curriculum for students with hearing impairments that uses specific test-taking strategies for enhancing test-taking abilities. (Contains 19 references.) (CR)

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Test-Taking Skills: A Missing Component of the Curriculum for Deaf Students

by

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Teachers throughout the United States make decisions daily about their students' instructional needs in reading based on the students' test performance. The assumption of teachers is that what the child produces during or after reading (the product) can shed some light on the cognitive activity (the reading process) that occurs while reading. One needs to be careful making such assumptions, as there is not a one-to-one product/process relationship. A reader can "comprehend" what is read yet fail to demonstrate that comprehension for a variety of reasons, including not understanding the question or not preparing properly for the type of test that was given. A reader can also get a correct answer on a test without comprehending by good guessing or using general world knowledge to answer the question.

A review of the literature in test-taking as it relates to deaf and hard-of-hearing (d/hh) students reveals that teachers working with d/hh children need to be even more careful than teachers working with hearing children about assuming that a child's test performance reflects the reading process. Such a review reveals that compared to hearing peers, *task* variables impact more greatly on d/hh students' performance on tests (Davey, LaSasso, & Macready, 1982; LaSasso, 1979; LaSasso, 1986; LaSasso & Davey, 1983; King & Quigley, 1985; Trybus & Buchanen, 1973; McKee and Bondi-Wolcott, 1982; DiFrancesca & Carey, 1972; Wolk & Schildroth, 1984). Further, the review indicates that d/hh students use specific test-taking strategies which hearing students either do not use or use infrequently (LaSasso, 1985, 1986; Saviddes & LaSasso, 1988;

Wolk & Schildroth, 1984; Webster, Wood, & Griffiths, 1981) much more extensively in test-taking situations than hearing peers. An example of a test-taking strategy that d/hh students use is visual matching which is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Example of Visual Matching

Partial Text

The electric eel is a fish which is native to south America. It defends itself from attacks of enemies by a natural electric battery. A discharge from this battery is powerful. It can stun even the largest animals. In South America, roads often pass...

Question

How is the eel used by the Indians?

Response

attacks of enemies.

The student's response consists of words taken verbatim from the text which are within two lines above or below a word in the text that matches a word in the question. LaSasso (1985) found that 3/4 of d/hh students used this strategy at least 1/4 of the time, half of the students used it 1/3 of the time and 1/6 of the students used it at least 2/3 of the time of the time on an open-ended question task, compared to hearing students who used this strategy infrequently.

Although standardized reading tests have been criticized as not being clear indicators of process (Searfoss & Readence, 1994) and reliance on tests as indicators of reading achievement has decreased with the increasing popularity of portfolio assessment (Tierney, Carter & Desai, 1991; Valencia, 1990), important educational and vocational decisions continue to be made about d/hh students on the basis of their daily, informal, and standardized test performance. Accordingly, teachers have a responsibility to: (1) expose d/hh students to the full spectrum of testing procedures different teachers use to determine that learning, including text-based learning, has taken place and (2) provide extensive practice in taking different types of tests.

Teachers, administrators and others working with d/hh children in instructional situations need to be familiar with the literature related to characteristics of d/hh test-takers. Further, they need to understand the relationship between: (1) what a d/hh student truly comprehends while reading and (2) the d/hh student's performance on a reading comprehension task. In addition, those working with d/hh children need to understand that many aspects of test-taking can be *taught* to students and *developed* with sufficient practice and feedback.

Curricula for d/hh children need specific, formal test-taking components that ensure daily testing in most, if not all, subjects, with the full spectrum of test formats and testing conditions. Teachers at all grade levels and in all subjects need to be held accountable for not only developing their

students' content knowledge and abilities but also their abilities to demonstrate their comprehension of that content.

The curriculum for d/hh students should include specific test-taking strategies for developing test-taking abilities (e.g., Rafael's (1986) Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy), self-monitoring strategies (e.g.,Vaughan and Estes, (1986) SMART strategy, Reciprocal Questioning, also known as ReQuest (Manzo and Manzo, 1990) and Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar, 1984). In QAR, students are taught to analyze how they could or should have gotten an answer to a particular question: (1) "right there," meaning it is explicitly stated in the text, (2) "think and search," meaning the answer is not in the text but must be inferred or constructed from different parts of the text, (3) "author and you," the answer is not in the story; it must be constructed by prior knowledge and text information, and (4) "on my own," meaning the answer is almost exclusively from the student's experience and prior knowledge; the text was merely a convenient means of stimulating consideration of it. The SMART method (Vaughan & Estes, 1986) involves having students keep track of their comprehension by using only two marginal notations (+ = I understand or I have no questions; ? = I'm confused or I have a question). The Reciprocal Questioning and Reciprocal Teaching methods involve teacher modeling to help students understand how to ask questions, set a reading purpose, and integrate reading information.

The test-taking component of a curriculum for d/hh students should not only include specific strategies for developing d/hh students' test-taking needs but should be specific about how often d/hh children should be tested. In the final analysis, a large part of anyone's test-taking abilities relates to one's experience with a particular type of test. In other words, the more tests one takes, the better test-taker one becomes.

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